



Institute for Natural Resources

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Susan Myers, Executive Director
Oregon Government Ethics Commission
3218 Pringle Road SE, Suite 220
Salem, Oregon 97302-1680

Ms. Myers,

The Independent Research and Science Team (IRST) seeks advice regarding how it can conduct its required written work, particularly developing scientific deliverables, in an efficient and timely manner to meet deadlines without violating Oregon public meetings law.

The IRST was established via SB 1501 as part of the Oregon Department of Forestry's Adaptive Management Program. The IRST's purpose is to complete work described in division 603 of OAR chapter 629 and section 38(8), chapter 33, Oregon Laws 2022 (For the full rules about the Adaptive Management Program, go to [Department of Forestry, Chapter 629, Division 603 ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT](#)). The IRST became operational in December 2023 and this group meets once per month following Oregon's public meetings laws. The Institute for Natural Resources (INR) at Oregon State University is the housing agency of the IRST.

Much science-based work, including writing, reviewing, and editing, is necessary between the monthly IRST meetings. For instance, the IRST pursues scientific inquiries via various avenues, including literature reviews, field monitoring, original research, commissioned studies, and other means of scientific inquiry. Without an efficient means for members to communicate and collaborate between monthly meetings, it is unclear how the IRST can meet the deadlines for deliverables, which are established in rule and in response to research questions packages from the Adaptive Management Program Committee (AMPC).

Three times per year, the AMPC provides the IRST research questions packages. Each research questions package has a different subject. The subjects this year include roads, Eastern steep slopes, and amphibians. Below is an example from an AMPC letter to the IRST explaining the work the IRST needs to accomplish for the current (roads) research questions package.

“The AMPC appreciates your using this document to guide your work in the next step of the Adaptive Management Program, which includes your completing the following items per rules:

- 1. In consultation with the AMPC, refine these preliminary research questions into finalized research questions. The intent is for these finalized research questions to be able to be addressed via studies. Additionally, the AMPC requests feedback from the IRST on the level of detail in this entire document so that subsequent preliminary research question packages are more helpful for the IRST.*

2. *Develop scoping proposal(s) for how to address the finalized research questions. The proposal(s) need(s) to include³:*
 - a. *A literature review that specifies the need for or the type of monitoring, research, commissioned studies, or other means of scientific inquiry necessary to answer the finalized research question mentioned in #1;*
 - b. *A preliminary estimate of the budget for each year of the research, and a timeline to complete the research project with specific deliverables; and,*
 - c. *A preliminary description of research project requirements, scope of work including an estimate of the timeline and key milestones, and an estimate of the degree to which knowledge may be improved if the research proposal is implemented.”*

Because the IRST is a new entity, it must also develop and document in writing all processes that are not part of the charter, including but not limited to: IRST member nomination and application processes, requests for quotations and request for proposals based on a research agenda set by the AMPC (which in turn is based on the “research questions packages” noted above), proposal review processes, reviewing research proposals, writing reports and research summaries, etc.

We are hopeful that you will be able to provide us with advice on how the IRST can conduct its work, and how each IRST member can efficiently contribute their expertise to the written deliverables, allowing the IRST to meet its deadlines and achieve its goals in support of the Adaptive Management Program Committee. As the rules have been explained to us, the IRST members cannot work collaboratively on documents outside of public meetings. This restriction severely limits the ability to produce the many complex documents required to meet IRST mandates, so we are requesting the Commission’s advice on possible solutions. One proposed option to achieve the intent of the Oregon Public Meetings Law is to give IRST members the opportunity to simultaneously edit a document in an online space in which the public can view and observe edits and comments IRST members make as the document is in a draft stage. In a public online site, we would identify which edits were accepted, and which were not, creating space for IRST members to debate and explore, thus strengthening overall IRST products. We very much welcome your opinion on the proposed option and advice on any other approaches that allow the IRST to honor its commitment to the Oregon Public Meetings Law and effectively and efficiently accomplish its work on behalf of the citizens of Oregon.

The IRST values the intent of the Oregon Public Meetings Law and believes options such as the one suggested above create transparency for the public.

Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions or need further clarification.

Sincerely,

Kelly Burnett, IRST Chair

Lisa Gaines, Director, Institute for Natural Resource